

Food Sovereignty: A Primer

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ABSTRACT: *Food sovereignty is a movement growing from the farmers, agricultural workers, people, and landless workers. It is an ongoing global struggle over control of food, land, water, and livelihoods. It asserts that people must reclaim their power and right in the food system by rebuilding the relationships between people and the land. The concept has become a central issue in the discourse of food activists around the world. This paper provides a brief introduction to food sovereignty.*

KEY WORDS: *Food sovereignty, food security, food justice, agriculture, food systems, global food economy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and the food it provides are fundamentally important for everyone. Food is a basic human need and no one should have to go hungry. The agricultural system no longer values healthy food and sustainable rural communities. Neoliberal policies (which gives priority to business and profit) have strengthened the industrialization of agriculture, thereby forcing millions of farmers to abandon their traditional agricultural practices to rural exodus. This situation led to the emergence of the international grassroots social movement (known as food sovereignty movement), formed to address the indignities of the current food system. It is composed of small farmers, fishers, consumers, activists, and environmentalists. Food sovereignty (FS) is the radical movement that promotes the right of nations and individuals to choose what type of food to eat, where it comes from, and how it is grown. It allows communities to have control over the way food is produced, traded, and consumed. It is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food. Food sovereignty was born in response to advocates dissatisfaction with food security, which emphasises access to adequate nutrition for all [1]. Food security is a fundamental human right. It continues to be a pressing economic and social concern. It is related to food problems which include poverty, famine, diseases, lack of fertile soils, climate change, and water scarcity [2]. Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Food sovereignty, like food security, is about human rights we have as eaters, citizens, and communities.

La Via Campesina (or International Peasant Movement) is the international movement that introduced the concept of food sovereignty. It is an international advocacy network of small-producer organizations, representing over 150 million farmers and agricultural workers on five continents. The concept of FS was brought to the public debate during the World Food Summit in 1996. The foundation of FS is self-determined food production. The global peasant movement unites likeminded people to fight injustice in the food system. Via Campesina wants WTO (World Trade Organization) out of agriculture because they execute policies dictated by the interests of large transnational agro-industrial companies. Food sovereignty is generally regarded as something tightly connected to a social movement.

II. SIX PILLARS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The food sovereignty movement has developed six fundamental principles [3].

1. **Food for People:** FS puts people's need for food at the center of policies. The right to food which is healthy and culturally appropriate is the basic legal demand of food sovereignty.
2. **Valuing Food Providers:** FS values and supports the contributions and respects the rights farmers. Many smallholder farmers suffer violence, marginalization and racism from corporate landowners and governments. Food sovereignty asserts food providers' right to live and work in dignity.
3. **Localizing Food Systems:** This reduces distance between food providers and consumers. The 'free trade' policies which prevent developing countries from protecting their own agriculture, for example through subsidies and tariffs, are inimical to food sovereignty.

4. **Making Decisions Locally:** FS places control over territory, in the hands of local food suppliers. Privatization of such resources is explicitly rejected.
5. **Builds Knowledge and Skills:** FS calls for appropriate research systems to support the development of agricultural knowledge and skills. It uses research to support and pass on this knowledge to future generations.
6. **Working with Nature:** FS requires avoiding energy-intensive industrial methods that damage the environment and the health of those that inhabit it. It requires working with nature in ecological production, rather than chemically-intensive monocultures.

Movements of people around the globe are fighting for food sovereignty. The fight for food sovereignty will be won when these six revolutionary principles are incorporated into national and international agricultural policies. The food crisis will be resolved if the principles of food sovereignty are recognized and adopted by the state as a guiding framework to transform the agricultural sector.

VALUES OF FS : Besides the six principles, the organizational values of food sovereignty are presented as follows [4].

1. **Autonomy:** The concept of food sovereignty enshrines the autonomy of peoples and communities to define their food and agricultural systems. Food sovereignty abolishes all direct and indirect export supports.
2. **Pluralism:** Proponents of food sovereignty advance the democratic control of localized food production to achieve food security with sustainable production.
3. **Gender:** Women in agriculture face gendered obstacles to equal power, resulting in a higher level of food insecurity than men. The possibility of pro-poor, gender-responsive state intervention to transform the food system might be a wishful thinking.
4. **Localization:** Food sovereignty involves a central call for the localization of the food production. It seeks to embed food in localized food system as it rejects neoliberal trade agreements. It rejects global control of the food system and the liberalization of international agricultural trade.

Benefitist and Challenges: Food sovereignty is an emerging policy framework of global food and agriculture politics, which addresses the contemporary food crises including poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. Many countries have incorporated food sovereignty into their legal systems, national constitutions, and laws, including Bolivia, Ecuador, Mali, Nepal, Senegal, and Venezuela [5]. The successful implementation of food sovereignty policy has rapidly increased domestic food production in Cuba, for example, and farming has become one of the highest-paid occupations in the country [6].

A rarely examined question is the meaning of the term “sovereignty” itself. Food sovereignty movements and food justice advocates face a paradox in as much as efforts to strengthen food sovereignty at the national level inevitably strengthen the states. Who will draw the line and enforce it? [7]. The practical applicability of food sovereignty concept remains a major challenge for the developing countries. The development of the food sovereignty model is constrained in that it cannot yet provide a ready-made set of policies for national and global governance of agricultural policies. Another key challenge of theorizing food sovereignty lies in understanding what “diversity in unity” means. Although food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture, it is not clear how to cash out these ideas [8]. The lack of clarity and contradictions of the six founding principles of FS have led to critiques and debates. FS says nothing on the political conditions that are necessary to develop food sovereignty. As a movement, FS will not succeed without building alliances between peasants and other social classes.

III. CONCLUSION

Food sovereignty is a global alliance of farmers, growers, rural women, consumers, and activists. It is a concept for the democratization of food production and distribution. Food sovereignty is the right of local peoples to define their own agricultural and food policy, without any dumping on third countries. It has much to contribute to environmental ethics and movements for social and environmental justice. Some regard the practice of food sovereignty as radical food politics. It has become a guiding principle for rural social movements around the world, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It can help us build a more democratic, equitable, and accountable political system. For more information on food sovereignty, one should consult the books in [9,10] and similar books available on Amazon.com.

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